

George Sealy House
2424 Broadway
Galveston
Galveston County
Texas

HABS No. TX-298

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PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20243

GEORGE SEALY HOUSE

Location:

2424 Broadway, Galveston, Galveston County,
Texas.

Present Owner
and Occupant:

Robert Sealy

Significance:

The builder of the house, George Sealy, was an outstanding Galveston businessman in the second half of the 19th century. He accumulated considerable wealth and was associated with numerous Galveston business ventures. If the house was designed by Stanford White, as present research seems to support, then it is the only structure in Texas and possibly in this section of the county by that architect. Questions of the designer aside, the building itself is an outstanding design and a notable example of the neo-Renaissance style. It is also representative of the wealth that was concentrated in Galveston in that period of time.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1887-1890.
2. Architect: Through the years the famous New York architect, Stanford White, has been credited with the design of the Sealy house. A check in the firms' archives in recent years was inconclusive in that no definite record of the design was found. There has been located, however, a typed copy of specifications for completion of the interior finish work that was prepared by McKim, Mead and White. Nicholas J. Clayton, an outstanding Texas and Galveston architect, was the supervising architect for the work. The house was completed at an estimated cost of \$65,000.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

George Sealy was born into a large, unpretentious family in Luzerne County, Pennsylvania on January 9, 1835. His early education was received in the local schools but at the age of twelve it was necessary for him to find work and aid in supporting his family. He continued his education whenever possible.

In 1857 Sealy determined to go to Texas and in preparation entered a business college to acquire a business education. He arrived in Galveston in November 1857 and secured a place with Ball, Hutchings and Company, a leading Texas cotton and commission company. In 1860 Sealy developed a banking department in the business and by 1867 he was a full partner. The company progressed rapidly following the Civil War and became a leading Texas banking establishment during the latter part of the century.

Sealy was also active in numerous other business ventures. He was instrumental in developing the Gulf, Colorado and Santa Fe Railroad which was later merged with the Atcheson, Topeka and Santa Fe Company for an exchange of twenty-five million dollars. He was also president of the Texas Guarantee and Trust Company, vice-president of the Gulf, Colorado and Santa Fe Railroad Company, treasurer of the Galveston Cotton Exchange, Galveston Rope and Twine Company, Galveston Free School Board, Galveston Maritime Association, Galveston Protestant Orphans Home and Galveston Evening Tribune Publishing Company; a director in the Galveston Wharf Company, Galveston Cotton Exchange, Galveston Maritime Association, Texas Land and Loan Company, Rembert Roller Compress Company, Southern Cotton Compress Company, Bluefields Banana Company, Galveston Agency of the Galveston Meat Exporting Company, and the Galveston Electric Light Company.

C. Bibliography:

1. Secondary and published sources:

Brindley, Anne. Historic Galveston Homes. Galveston Historical Society. 1951, p. 30.

Brown, John H. Indian Wars and Pioneers of Texas. pp. 159-164.

Galveston News. January 1, 1888.

Morgan, William M. Trinity Protestant Episcopal Church, Galveston, 1841-1953. Houston and Galveston: The Anson Jones Press, 1954, pp. 376-78.

Prepared by: John C. Garner, Jr.
Director
Galveston Architecture Inventory
March 20, 1967

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Sealy house is an outstanding example of the neo-Renaissance style with its massive proportions and eclectic details. It is a two and a half story masonry structure with a full basement and high-pitched hipped roof.
2. Condition of fabric: The building is in good condition throughout.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: Maximum dimensions including galleries make the house approximately 70' x 80'.
2. Foundations: The foundations consist of brick piers connected at the top by round arches. It is probable that the piers have a spread footing.
3. Wall construction: The walls are solid masonry and on the exterior are faced with a very thin light buff colored brick, reported to have been made in Belgium. The mortar joints were originally pointed with a fine white mortar surface. Sandstone blocks are also used in the wall for accent.
4. Structural system: All walls are load bearing and the whole structure is carried by the arched brick piers in the basement. The floor system of the first story floor consists of heavy timber girders and sills with timber braces wedged between. Metal tie-rods further hold the system together.
5. Porches: A front gallery in the form of an arcade serves as an entrance porch. In addition the polygonal southeast tower served originally as an open gallery. An open circular upper gallery is located on the west facade. All galleries are roofed and have tile floors.
6. Chimneys: The chimneys are very tall, of brick and consist of several flues combined in one stack.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The front entrance consists of a pair of ornate, four-panel double doors.
 - b. Windows: The windows on the ground floor are principally double-hung wood sash with six lights in the top sash and one below. Windows opening onto galleries upstairs are floor length casements.

8. Roofs: The roof is in several intersecting sections of a complex outline. Over the central block it is of very steep pitch and hipped. Various dormers intersect it as well as secondary roofs covering wings and towers. All roof areas are tiled.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plan: The basement is generally a series of open interconnecting spaces. Above, on the first floor, are the major rooms; these are arranged around a large central hall. A small vestibule leads into this space and a polygonal bay forming the stair hall terminates it. Flanking the hall on the west is the large drawing room with a projecting curved bay on the west wall and a music chamber alcove terminating the north end. To the east of the central hall is the adjoining dining room which connects with a pantry and kitchen to the north. The library projects onto the front gallery at the southeast corner of the house.

The second floor consists of four bedrooms arranged around the upper central hall, and generally corresponds to the spaces below.

From here a winding rear stair leads up to the attic space which has an auditorium with stage and other rooms for storage.

2. Stairway: The major stair occupies the north wall of the stair hall. It consists of alternating landings and stairs. A winding back stair connects all floors from basement to the attic.
3. Floors: The floors in the drawing room are 2" oak; cherry in the library. The central hall has oak parquet floors and the dining room has mahogany boards. All floors upstairs are wood.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: The central hall is paneled and has a beamed ceiling, all of which is American quartered oak. Also the staircase is American oak and all panelings are carried up to the wainscot in the second story hall.

The drawing room is finished in panels of yellow silk with wood classical pilasters and moldings painted white. These pilasters extend around all walls and rest on a continuous short pedestal also of wood. The ceiling is covered with canvas that was originally painted sky-blue.

Finish in the library is all cherry-wood, with the walls lined by bookcases with glass doors. Above, the walls are covered with yellow "tapestry" and the ceiling plastered.

Dining room walls are mahogany paneled wainscot and upper part covered with canvas, "fibrine". The ceilings are beamed in mahogany with plain painted panels between.

5. Doors: Double sliding doors with nine panels connect the drawing room and central hall. Other doors are four panel.
6. Trim: The house is finished in great detail with wood trim around all openings.
7. Hardware: All hardware is original and typical of the period -- mortice locks, butt hinges.
8. Mantels and fireplaces: Every major room is provided with a fireplace. Those upstairs are typical wooden mantels with mirrors over and faced with ceramic tiles.

Downstairs, the fireplaces in the drawing room, identical and in opposite walls, the north and south, have facings and hearths of Algerian onyx. An ornate white-painted wood mantel with neo-Renaissance details and large mirror surmount each one.

In the central hall, a massive mahogany hood and hearth and facings of speckled gold brick is back to back with the dining room fireplace which has Sienna marble facings and an ornate mahogany mantel and mirror.

The fireplace in the library has a Numidian marble hearth and facings and, again, an ornate wood mantel and mirror above.

9. Mechanical equipment:

- a. Lighting: Most of the original electric fixtures are in place.

D. Site:

1. Orientation and general setting: The building occupies the entire south half of Block 204 and faces south on Broadway.
2. Enclosure: Cast iron fence.
3. Outbuildings: The carriage house which was designed by Nicholas Clayton and erected in 1891, is located to the east of the house and adjoins the alley. It is an excellent Romanesque design with the principal feature the round tower. The building, constructed of brick, is two stories high and has a complex roof system of various hips and gables.

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PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

The Galveston Survey was jointly sponsored by the National Park Service, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation and the Galveston Historical Foundation Inc., and developed under the direction of James C. Massey, Chief of the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS). The historical data was written by John C. Garner, Jr., acting as the Director of the Galveston Architecture Inventory. The written data was edited for transmittal to the Library of Congress in the summer of 1980 by Kent R. Newell of the HABS staff. The photographs were taken by Allen Stross in the summer of 1967.